

## Editor's Note

Trevor Bliss's essay attempts to persuade the audience about an issue that is far removed from the lives of many college freshmen. The author's research reflects depth and quality of information: sources are authoritative. However, sources are not explicitly introduced in the text with information about their authority on the topic. Is such information necessary to ensure the credibility of the evidence? Why or why not?

Consider how the writer addresses opposing or alternative points of view: Is the refutation compelling and thorough? What points does he concede? *Logos* is clearly at work in this text. How does the discussion demonstrate *pathos* and *ethos*?

The essay opens with a classical, three-part introduction, using as its hook a dramatic account of a tragic accident. How does this narrative opening engage you as a reader and affect your response to the rest of the argument? The opening paragraph takes up more than two-thirds of the first page. Does the appearance of this large block of text at the essay's beginning encourage a reader to approach the text, or might some audiences find it daunting?

# License Renewal Laws for the Elderly

Trevor Bliss

Santa Monica farmers market is usually a peaceful scene, full of people enjoying their weekend with fellow community members. On July 16, 2003, however, something very terrifying occurred. A Buick Le Sabre came barreling over the road dividers at freeway speeds and continued to charge through the mass of people not stopping until 10 were dead and more than 70 injured. According to the judge of this drivers case, "Mr. Weller chose to steer into the people, plowing into the crowd and literally launching bodies into the air as his car sped 2½ blocks" (Lagorio). The most terrifying part of this event was that this man suffered from no mental illnesses and was not the subject to any serious social or anger issues. The only thing this driver suffered from was old age. According to his defense attorneys, Weller simply mistook the gas pedal from the brake pedal. You may be wondering how someone who cannot differentiate the gas from the brake until he has gone through 80 people, a road divider, and 2½ blocks managed to get their drivers license. The answer is really quite simple. Weller legally obtained his license long ago, and simply had to

renew it, most likely by mail, until the age of 86 when the accident occurred. Although on the extreme end, Wellers' case is not an isolated incident. As drivers age, they simply become less and less fit to drive. With the Baby Boomers getting closer and closer to obtaining senior citizen status, more and more elderly drivers will be on our roads and that means there will be much more at risk drivers. Therefore, California must mandate stricter license renewal laws for the elderly.

One of the biggest factors contributing the decline in driving ability for the elderly is the deterioration of vision as humans age. After the age of 40, our vision begins to decrease, objects become blurrier, and we have trouble seeing details in focus (Old age). As we all know, almost all of driving is being able to see and react to what is in front of us on the road. So the worse our vision is the more at risk we are on the road, and after the age of 40 vision in humans inevitably gets worse as. Yes, elderly drivers can wear contacts or glasses to see sufficiently, but it cannot be guaranteed that everyone with bad vision is wearing the proper equipment to correct their vision. Because of this, as people get older and their vision gets worse more thorough checks on their driving ability become necessary.

Besides vision, age related illnesses are the most detrimental factor when it comes to determining an elderly person's fitness to drive. Two of the most common of these illnesses are dementia and Alzheimer's, which is a form of dementia. It is estimated that between 25 and 35 percent of persons over the age of 85 have some form of dementia and about four million Americans have Alzheimer's disease (Wu). According to a study done at the University of Houston, "Dementia, even when mild, can impair the skills required to drive safely. Research has shown that *drivers* with *dementia* are at an increased risk of motor vehicle crashes and other adverse driving events, including becoming lost in familiar areas, driving in the wrong direction on roadways, failing to follow directional signs, and cutting across center lines" (Adler). The key thing to note from this study is that these dangerous driving habits were present not just with the extreme cases of the disease, but when the victim had just mild cases of dementia. On top of making physical mistakes while driving, this research also showed that drivers with dementia "are not always able to make appropriate decisions on their own about driving modification and cessation because of lack of insight, poor judgment, and a loss of reasoning ability" (Adler). So even if a driver happens to be diagnosed with dementia but is still by all means physically capable of driving, they are still very likely to not have the mental capacity to make sound decisions while driving. These facts are really only relevant if elderly persons diagnosed with dementia continue to drive. Well, according to pubmedcentral.com, "Of those who were driving at the time of diagnosis [of dementia], 73% continued to drive for at least a year, and these persons drove for a median of 24 months". Now obviously not every-

one who is diagnosed continues to drive and I'm sure many of the drivers who know they are not fit to drive make the sound decision to retire their keys. The only problem is that statistically 73% of people continue to drive for at least a year, and as deduced by the University of Houston, even if these people have a mild case of the disease, they still suffer from poor judgment and dangerous driving habits.

So theoretically, due to the loss of vision and age-related illnesses, elderly persons are more at risk on the road. But does this actually translate to more accidents on the road, or do these factors only appear to be dangerous in specific studies? Let's take a look at the crash statistics by age. According to the Center for Transportation Analysis, after the age of 65 the risk of being in a fatal accident goes up with age. Per 100 million miles driven, drivers aged 65 to 79 were involved in less than 10 deaths, while drivers aged 80-84 were involved in about 10 deaths and drivers aged 85, and older were involved in almost 18 deaths (Oak Ridge).<sup>1</sup> This, of course, does not say that these drivers are getting in accidents solely because of vision problems and age-related illnesses, but it does show that they are involved in significantly more accidents the older they become and these problems and illnesses are just our best guess as to what is causing those accidents. Also, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, fatal involvement in crashes is lowest at the ages of 55-59 and begins to rise again at age 65 and continues to rise until the 85+ age group.

Looking at the above, it is easy to notice that drivers 16 to 19 are involved in a significant amount of crashes, even more than elderly drivers in most cases. The difference between teen drivers and elderly drivers is that teen drivers recently have been tested on their knowledge of road rules and ability to drive. They just simply lack the experience that older drivers have. They are also closely monitored by insurance companies and parental figures because it is understood that they have not yet had the time to fine tune their skills behind the wheel. Elderly drivers, however, already have the knowledge and experience of driving but simply struggle to retain the ability to be safe drivers. Despite the fact that they are involved in comparable amounts of fatal accidents to teens and significantly more than middle aged drivers, we have very few checks to ensure that drivers renewing their licenses still are qualified to have a driver's license.

One check to elderly driver's competence behind the wheel is that physicians, police officers, or family members can report to the DMV when they believe someone is unfit to drive. Doctors are even required to report certain conditions such as Alzheimer's (in California) but not all forms of dementia. The DMV then can investigate and reevaluate that person's ability to drive (Medical). This undoubtedly saves

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<sup>1</sup> Image removed for copyright purposes.

a significant amount of lives a year, but is not a thorough enough check for all elderly drivers. Many elderly are not diagnosed by a doctor until years after they obtain an illness and doctors are not required to report all potentially dangerous conditions such as forms of dementia milder than Alzheimer's. In addition to this, many drivers do not have any diagnosable illness, but due to old age are simply no longer fit to drive. Few would argue with the statement that all humans will inevitably reach a point in their lives when they are no longer able to drive a vehicle. Without the DMV having any comprehensive test for fitness to drive, unless warned by an outside source, the only thing stopping an unsafe elderly driver from being on the road is themselves.

To most of us, driving represents freedom and independence. Without a license many of us, especially the elderly, would feel stranded or alone. Many other elderly may also not be able to maintain jobs or support themselves financially without licenses. Although this is a sad thought and is tempting to give into the pity of our senior citizens, the fact of the matter is that many elderly drivers are unsafe behind the wheel and endanger everyone else on the road. Thus, no matter how dependent on driving these elderly are, they should not be issued a license. I am not trying to take away all senior citizens licenses, I simply am insisting on a more thorough check on the fitness of persons over the age of 65 to operate a vehicle. In Florida, of drivers over the age of 80 required to retake a vision test when renewing their license about 93% passed ("Must"). This shows that a relatively small percentage of drivers will not be able to renew their licenses through vision tests, but it does filter out some of the drivers who on the worse end of the vision spectrum.

Whether it is vision, dementia, or Alzheimer's disease, elderly drivers are statistically less fit to drive than younger humans. These dangerous conditions are reflected in the crash statistics, which clearly show that after the age of 65 the older we get the more fatal crashes we are involved in. The only way to prevent such accidents and save lives is to mandate stricter license renewal laws. These laws will force the elderly to take simple vision and road knowledge tests to ensure the safety of not only the elderly drivers, but everyone else on the road.

*Trevor Bliss is a computer engineering major.*

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